

How Sundays Changed the World I Love Sundays,

This morning, I want to show you how Sunday has changed the world. There is a gigantic amount of good that has been done by the people who call Sunday their Sabbath over the last two thousand years.

Are you ready for this?

Throughout our series we've been reading the words of the prophet Isaiah, who promised that .

**If you call the Sabbath a delight
and the LORD's holy day honorable,
and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,
then you will find your joy in the LORD,
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land (Isaiah 58:13–14).**

THE STORY OF SUNDAY:

I've always been impressed by people who could look into the future and shape the world in a positive way.

People like Charlemagne, who decided that every child in his empire should learn to read, so he created the first public education system.

Or in our own country, people like Patrick Henry, who fomented a revolution by declaring that liberty was more precious to him than life itself.

Or Abraham Lincoln, who led the United States through the Civil War and ended the tyranny of slavery.

Fifty years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. was able to envision a day when people would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, and the civil rights movement was born.

The ability to imagine a better future and help create it is a gift, and when people use it, they give a great gift to others. History is full of these people, but in my humble opinion, the greatest foreseer and shaper of the future was a carpenter from Nazareth named Jesus. No one has given the world a greater gift than Jesus.

How did it happen?

In the closing days of His life on earth, Jesus stood beneath a great rock in Caesarea Philippi and boldly announced that He would build His Church and that nothing and no one would keep Him from it.

I want to read you His exact words in Matthew 16, so open your Bible there please.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:13–18).

The story of Jesus and His Church is an underdog story. Jesus is about to overcome the world with both hands tied behind His back.

FOLLOW ME:

Hal Seed, the author of the book *(I Love Sundays)* writes:

Skim through the Gospel records and you'll find thirteen times when Jesus makes a two-word request of His disciples: “Follow me.” It's His most frequently repeated phrase. By it, Jesus was asking His followers to imitate His values and actions. “Follow me” meant “Do as I do. Think as I think. Love people they way I love them.”

The disciples took His request seriously. Wherever they went, they cared for people, listening to their hurts, healing them when possible, proclaiming the Good News that God was real and had come to earth in the form of a man named Jesus.

Those original disciples followed Jesus to Greece, Turkey, Spain, Italy, India, Africa, and parts in between. Within a century, Christianity had spread throughout the Mediterranean Basin. Wherever they went, they loved people so authentically that their faith was contagious.

New religions were illegal in the Roman Empire, so Christians were persecuted. Sometimes their belongings were seized. Other times their bodies were burned or fed to lions or used as gladiator-fodder in the Roman Circus Colosseum. Instead of scaring people from Christianity, these heroic acts drew people to the Church. No one could argue about the sincerity of Christians' beliefs. So the movement grew.

Jesus rose on Sunday, so His followers started gathering for worship and refreshment every Sunday. Seed calls the followers of Jesus “Sunday people.”

HISTORY:

Jesus taught His followers to love their neighbors as themselves, so in Acts 2, during the first few weeks after the Church was born, the Bible says,

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. . . . And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:44–45, 47).

Jesus taught His followers to care for the hungry, so in Acts 4, the Bible says, **There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need (Acts 4:34–35).**

No wonder so many were attracted to these Sunday people!

As Jesus's Sunday people spread to other parts of the world, from Israel to Syria, they started a church in Antioch. Listen to this description of what Antioch was like before Christianity arrived: *"[It was . . .] a city filled with misery, danger, fear, despair, and hatred. A city where the average family lived in filthy and cramped quarters, where at least half of the children died at birth or during infancy, and where most of the children who lived lost at least one parent before reaching maturity. A city filled with hatred and fear rooted in intense ethnic antagonisms."* (I'm quoting historian Rodney Stark: *The Rise of Christianity*, HarperCollins, 1997, p. 160.)²

Now listen to Stark's description of what happened when Sunday people showed up there: *"Once Christianity did appear, its superior capacity for meeting these chronic problems soon became evident and played a major role in its ultimate triumph."* (*The Rise of Christianity*, p. 162)

That type of story has repeated itself year after year in every country and place where Jesus's people went.

THE STORY OF ONE CHURCH:

There's a story of a church planter named Francis Kamau, who felt called to plant a church in his hometown of Nairobi, Kenya. When choosing a site for his church, Kamau decided to locate it in one of the worst districts he could find. His church bought land two blocks off a main boulevard that was home to lots of bars and brothels. Within two years of Francis moving in, most of the bars and brothels were closed, because the people had been won to the Lord and had sought better and more wholesome professions.

This is the story of the Church. Wherever Sunday people go, God goes. And lives change. And hope rises.

Pastor Bill Hybels has said, "The Church is the hope of the world." And he's right! Jesus, working through Sunday people, has altered the altitude of our world.

FORECAST:

World history isn't over, but we know where it's headed. And there are two events to anticipate for people who love Sundays and live them out on weekdays. I want to show them to you before we close this series.

So turn in your Bible to Revelation 19.

THE WEDDING SUPPER:

Revelation 19 depicts a day in the future when Jesus will be married to His people in the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

The apostle John describes it this way:

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” (Revelation 19:6–9)

When God was looking for a way to picture the joy and excitement of the day when Christ will be joined to His people, He described the greatest event available in New Testament times: a wedding feast.

The wedding supper of the Lamb will be the greatest day in history. It’s a real day, and it’s really coming. The Bible says we will be dressed that day in fine linen, and “Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.”

How do you get fine linen to wear to that wedding? You do good deeds in the name of Jesus.

Friends, don’t miss this. People get to heaven because of grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9). In a first-century wedding, the first act of a groom was to pay the bride price. Jesus paid that price on the cross of Calvary. Bride, you’ve been paid for.

Once the bride price has been paid, the bride returns home to prepare for her wedding. She makes everything for her new home, including her wedding garments.

If you’re a Christ follower, your price into heaven has already been paid. Now is the time to create your clothes. You do that by doing righteous acts, like Sunday people have always done.

Let me read you one more passage. It begins in Matthew 25:14. (Turn there with me, if you will.)

WELL DONE:

Jesus, just a few days before going to the cross, told this parable, which has become known as “The Parable of the Talents.” A “talent” was a huge sum of money. Follow along as I read:

[The kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

The man with two bags of gold also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you."

His master replied, "You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

"So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:14–30).

This is such an important lesson, friends. Don't miss this. When your life is over, there will be a moment when you are united with your Master. You will see Jesus face-to-face, and He will tell you what He thinks of the efforts you put toward advancing His kingdom. According to this parable, those who do an outstanding job will hear, "Well done!" And those who serve themselves instead of the king will hear, "You wick, lazy servant!"

More than anything I could receive in this world, I want to hear "well done" from my Bridegroom and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So Be the Church.

Take your place in history beside the Sunday people of every generation and make Jesus known to a lost and dying generation.